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ABSTRACT

This study replicates and extends an earlier study of interracial interaction patterns in an open enrollment "magnet" school. The earlier study conducted during the school's first year of operation found that: (1) race is an extremely important grouping criterion even for students who have chosen a segregated school, (2) sex is an even more important grouping criterion, (3) girls show more racial aggregation than boys, and (4) racial aggregation decreased over time in the 7th grade which met most of the conditions specified by Allport as conducive to improved intergroup relations, but increased in the 8th grade which had a predominantly white accelerated academic track and a predominantly black regular track. The present study found that all of the above patterns held true in the school's second year of operation with one exception: No increase in interracial interaction was found in the 7th grade. Cross-sectional comparison of the interaction patterns of this year's 7th and 8th graders who entered these grades with one year of positive desegregated experience to those of last year's 7th and 8th graders who had no parallel experience showed (1) as predicted, this year's 8th graders interact interracially more than last years's, and (2) the predicted parallel difference between this year's 7th graders and last year's was not found. The study's findings point up the crucial importance of attending to contact processes beyond the first year of desegregation. (Author/AM)

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Interracial Behavior in a "Magnet" School

Janet W. Schofield

H. Andrew Sagar

University of Pittsburgh*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Abstract

This study replicates and extends an earlier study of interracial interaction patterns in an open enrollment "magnet" school. The earlier study conducted during the school's first year of operation found (a) race is an extremely important grouping criterion even for students who have chosen a desegregated school, (b) however, sex is an even more important grouping criterion, (c) girls show more racial aggregation than boys, and (d) racial aggregation decreased over time in the seventh grade which met most of the conditions specified by Allport (1954) as conducive to improved intergroup relations but increased in the eighth grade which had a predominately white accelerated academic track and a predominately black regular track (Schofield & Sagar, 1977). This study found that all of the above patterns held true in the school's second year of operation with one exception -- no increase in interracial interaction was found in the seventh grade. Cross-sectional comparison of the interaction patterns of this year's seventh and eighth graders who entered these grades with one year of positive desegregated experience to those of last year's seventh and eighth graders who had no parallel experience showed (a) as predicted, this year's eighth graders interact interracially more than last year's, and (b) the predicted parallel difference between this year's seventh graders and last year's was not found.

Although the decision to desegregate the nation's schools was based primarily on the constitutional principle of equal protection under the law, many policy makers clearly view desegregation as one important means of improving relations between blacks and whites in this country (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968; Read, 1975; Wisdom, 1975). Social psychological theory and desegregation research both reveal this faith in the healing power of intergroup contact, in and of itself, to be terribly naive (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1967; St. John, 1975). However, they also suggest that, if the contact situation is carefully structured to fulfill certain conditions, improved intergroup relations should result. These conditions are: equal status within the contact situation, shared goals, cooperative interdependence in reaching these goals, and the support of authorities, law, or custom (Allport, 1954).

In spite of the need to learn more about the nature and extent of intergroup contact in desegregated schools, as well as the effects of such contact upon intergroup relations, research on the topic has been quite limited. First, although there are one or two notable exceptions, like the work of Gerard and Miller (1975), most of the research dealing with the effects of school desegregation programs on intergroup relations has been conducted during the first year of desegregation (St. John, 1975). Generalizing from such studies to longer-term desegregation may be risky since one would expect that students might react quite differently to desegregation when it is a controversial new development than when it is an established fact of life. Secondly, research has focused much more heavily on assessing the impact of desegregation on interracial attitudes than on interracial behavior. In addition, the studies which do attempt to assess interracial behavior do so almost exclusively

by using sociometric techniques rather than through the direct observation of behavior. The serious problems involved in the over-use of sociometric methods in assessing interracial behavior in desegregated schools have been discussed elsewhere (Schofield, in press; Schofield & Sagar, 1977). Surprisingly, only one of the 19 studies in St. John's (1975) comprehensive review of the literature on school desegregation and intergroup behavior entailed actual behavioral observation. Although there are a few recent studies not covered in St. John's review (Schofield & Sagar, 1977; Silverman & Shaw, 1973), the scarcity of behavioral research in this area is truly striking. Also, the studies which do exist suffer from the same emphasis on initial reactions to desegregation as do the attitude studies. To our knowledge, there is not a single systematic observational study of the interracial behavior of students in schools which have been desegregated for more than one year. Indeed, the Aronson and Nobel (1966) research spanned just six weeks, and Silverman and Shaw's (1973) study covered just the first semester of desegregation.

This paper reports a study designed to begin to fill the need for observational work on intergroup behavior in desegregated schools. Its focus is on interaction patterns in a new, desegregated, middle school during the school's second year of operation. The school, which will be described a little later, was specifically selected because it seemed to fulfill many of the contact-theory conditions for positively structured interracial contact. This study, which is an extension of the one we reported last year (Schofield & Sagar, 1977), has two general purposes. First, it will explore the question of whether the interaction patterns found in the first year persist. Secondly, it will assess the effect of one year of positively structured desegregation on intergroup behavior through both longitudinal and cross-sectional comparisons

of interaction patterns during the school's first and second year of operation.

More specifically, the study will investigate the following questions:

1. Is sex a more important grouping criterion than race for students in their second year of desegregation?

Previous study of interaction patterns in this desegregated school suggested that sex was a more important grouping criterion than race for seventh and eighth graders who were experiencing their first year of desegregation (Schofield & Sagar, 1977). This finding is congruent with a number of studies which suggest that children's friendship choices are generally more strongly influenced by sex than by race (Criswell, 1937; Goldman, 1970; Gordon, 1967; St. John & Lewis, 1975). However, it is certainly possible that, in the second year of desegregation, the previously found pattern of stronger clustering by sex than by race might well be reversed or at least attenuated.

2. Does sex influence the amount of interracial interaction that occurs?

Studies often suggest that black girls and white boys tend to have somewhat more difficulty in adjusting to desegregated schools than do black boys and white girls (St. John, 1975). However, this conclusion gives little indication of whether boys or girls are more likely to interact across racial group lines. The earlier study suggests that boys engage in considerably more interracial interaction than girls (Schofield & Sagar, 1977). However, since this finding was not predicted, it is especially important to see whether it can be replicated.

3. The third question to be explored is that of the long-term effect of desegregation upon the amount of intergroup interaction.

In the earlier study of the school's first year of operation, we hypothesized that in the seventh grade, where contact theory's conditions were largely met, interracial interaction would increase in the course of the first year of desegregation. No such optimistic prediction was made for the eighth grade, which violated the equal-status requirement by having a high-status, predominantly-white accelerated academic track and a low-status, predominantly-black regular track. As expected, interracial interaction increased over time in the seventh grade. Not surprisingly, such interaction actually decreased in the eighth grade.

This second study assesses the effect of one year's experience with desegregation upon these interracial interaction patterns. The new data permits cross-sectional comparisons of this year's seventh and eighth grade students with last year's seventh and eighth graders, who were similar except for their lack of prior experience with desegregation. It also makes possible longitudinal study of the group of students who were seventh graders during the first year of desegregation and eighth graders during the second.

Since this latter group of students moved from the apparently favorable conditions in the seventh grade, which last year led to an increase in interracial interaction, to the unfavorable (i.e., unequal status) conditions of the eighth grade, the testing of two hypotheses became especially salient. First, we hypothesized that the time trends in interracial interaction would be the same in the school's second year of operation as in its first; that is, an increase in interracial interaction over the course of the year was predicted for the current seventh grade, a decrease for the eighth grade. But, secondly we hypothesized that this year's eighth graders, with a year of positive desegregated experience behind them, would engage in more interracial

interaction overall than did last year's eighth graders who had had no such prior experience. Likewise, we expected this year's seventh graders to manifest more interracial interaction than did last year's seventh graders.

METHOD

The School

Wexler Middle School, which serves about 1200 students in grades six through eight, first opened its doors in the fall of 1975. The student body, 48% black, was obtained through open enrollment of students from a large district in the Northeastern industrial city in which the school is located. Students were selected on a first-come, first-serve basis within predetermined racial quotas. The white students typically come from middle- or upper-middle-class homes. Although a few of the black children are middle class, the majority are from working- or lower-class homes. A very large majority of the students had previously attended de facto segregated schools, and most of them are transported to Wexler on busses which are heavily segregated because of the residential segregation of the neighborhoods in which the students live.

The school's unusual efforts to provide an ideal environment for interracial education have been documented at length elsewhere (Schofield, 1976). A wide variety of special facilities and programs were designed to attract students and to foster a shared pride in the school. In general, the school was selected as coming about as close as could be realistically expected at this point in our society's history, to meeting the conditions laid down by contact theory as conducive to improving intergroup relations.

There is, however, one notable exception to the above generalization. In order to enhance the ability of the school to attract students, a prestigious city-wide accelerated academic program is offered in Wexler's eighth grade. Students in this program attend almost all classes together, mixing with others only in classes like homeroom and gym, and in the lunchroom, the setting of interest for this study. Approximately 80% of these students, who were chosen on the basis of test scores, are white. The rest of the eighth grade is heavily black.

The presence of the accelerated program in the eighth grade also appears to have had a ripple effect in the lower grades, attracting an atypically high-achieving white population which presumably hopes to qualify eventually for the eighth grade program. Thus, although formal status is seriously confounded with race only in the eighth grade, the lower grades are marked by a greater black-white achievement gap than might have been the case under a more random selection procedure.

In the fall of 1976, Wexler's enrollment policy was changed so that students from certain elementary schools were required to enter Wexler for sixth grade. The feeder system also altered the racial balance in the sixth grade, which is now approximately two-thirds black. However, neither of these changes had any direct effect on the composition of the seventh and eighth grades, which are the focus of this study.

Data Gathering

Coding of cafeteria seating patterns, as reported here, began in early September of the second year of Wexler's operation. Observations were made one day a week until the end of the school year in June.

The cafeteria contains 32 rectangular tables. Each table has 16 seats, eight on each long side. These seats are a part of the table units and cannot be moved. Elevated ramps along two sides of the cafeteria permit relatively easy and unobtrusive observation of the entire cafeteria. About ten minutes after the beginning of each grade's lunch period, the observer began mapping seating patterns, using a simple numerical code to note the ra and sex of the student in each occupied seat. The entire cafeteria was mappe in this way.

The Aggregation Index

The indices of racial clustering were computed according to the formula developed by Campbell et al (1966) in their study of interracial seating patterns in college classrooms. Somewhat analogous to a z-score, this index is based upon the difference between the actual frequency with which blacks and whites sit together and the expected frequency, given random distributio of the races within the pattern of occupied seats. The expected frequency is based on the proportion of blacks in the sample and the number of adjacen pairs of individuals observed. Individuals are not considered adjacent if separated by an empty seat . The index uses a denominator yardstick which is the standard deviation of the number of interracial adjacencies under randomness. Negative values represent more aggregation than would be expected if individuals sat randomly with respect to race, whereas positive values represent less aggregation than would be expected under randomness.

Campbell et al's (1966) formula was developed to analyze only side-by-side seating in rows. However, interviews with a random sample of sixth graders suggested that students were about as likely to sit across from the persons they ate lunch with as they were to sit next to them. Hence, two

indices of racial clustering were computed. First, an overall index of racial aggregation in side-by-side seating (Index 1) was computed, treating the seats on each side of each table as rows of eight. Then, an index of face-to-face aggregation (Index 2) was computed, treating each of the 256 pairs of face-to-face seats as rows of two. The two indices had a mean within-grade correlation of .61.

Side-by-side (SS) and face-to-face (FF) racial aggregation indices were also constructed for males (Indices 3 and 4) and females (Indices 5 and 6) separately. Unfortunately, as Campbell et al (1966) noted, their formula is based on a binary code (either "black" or "white") and does not permit ready analysis of the joint effects of race and sex. Hence, in computing the aggregation index for males, seats occupied by females were treated as empty. In the analysis of female patterns, just the opposite was true. Little data were lost in this way since cross-sex adjacencies, whether intra- or inter-racial, were extremely rare. Silverman and Shaw's (1973) data, which show that 90% of the interracial interactions in two junior high schools were between members of the same sex, are consistent with our observations.

Finally, indices of aggregation according to gender were computed. In constructing the indices of side-by-side (Index 7) and face-to-face (Index 8) gender aggregation, race was ignored. Each of the eight separate indices computed from each day's observation was treated as a single score in the following statistical analyses.

Aggregation indices for the sixth grade are not reported here since students in that grade, in contrast to those in the seventh and eighth grades, were assigned to specific areas in the lunchroom.

RESULTS

Race was found to be a powerful factor in student seating patterns for both sexes in both grades throughout the course of the school year. The mean racial aggregation indices for each of the two grade levels studied are presented in Table 1 along with parallel indices for males only (Indices 3 and 4) and females only (Indices 5 and 6). All of these means are significantly different from zero beyond the $p < .001$ level. Table 1 further indicates more interracial interaction among males than among females. This finding was consistent for both aggregation indices in both grades ($p < .001$ in all t-tests).

The actual amount of racial clustering indicated by the means in Table 1 can be illustrated by examining a fairly typical observation which yielded racial aggregation indices of -1.75 (SS) and -1.63 (FF). These indices were based on the seating locations of 119 white and 90 black students. Random distribution of these students within the pattern of occupied seats could be expected to have resulted in 46 SS and 32 FF interracial adjacencies. Six SS and six FF interracial adjacencies were actually found.

INSERT TABLE 2, about here

Table 2 presents comparisons of the racial and sexual aggregation indices. Although racial aggregation is highly significant, sex proved to be an even stronger grouping criterion on both indices.

The question of greatest interest, whether the school's active efforts to foster positive intergroup relations were attended by an actual increase in voluntary interracial interaction over time, was investigated in three ways.

To assess time trends in interaction occurring during the 1976-77 school year, Pearson product-moment correlations were computed between elapsed time and the indices of racial aggregation. Then, two other comparisons were made to examine the effect of the prior year's desegregated experience on present levels of interaction. First, the racial aggregation indices obtained from last year's seventh and eighth graders were compared to those obtained from this year's seventh and eighth graders. Second, the aggregation indices obtained last year from the class of students who were then seventh graders were compared with the indices obtained this year for this same class as eighth graders.

INSERT TABLE 3, about here

Table 3 reveals that the predicted decline in interaction in the eighth grade is apparent on the FF index (Index 2) but not on the SS index (Index 1). Interestingly, this pattern of results in the eighth grade replicates almost precisely the previous findings, suggesting that the year of desegregated schooling under positive circumstances does not substantially alter the negative impact of the unequal status arrangements in the eighth grade.

More surprising are the results for the seventh grade. Contrary to last year's finding, the hypothesized increase in interracial interaction did not occur. In fact, the correlations are negative, rather than positive as predicted, although they fall short of statistical significance.

Next, a set of analyses were performed to see if having experienced one year of desegregation under quite favorable conditions increased the amount of

interracial interaction in the subsequent year. First, this year's seventh graders, who had had a year of desegregated schooling, were compared with last year's seventh graders, who had not had this experience. Contrary to our predictions, no differences were found between these groups on either the SS or FF index, $t(46) = -1.92$ and -0.61, respectively.

Analysis was similar, but more extended, for this year's eighth graders since there is good data on the aggregation indices for this class for both the first and second year of desegregation. Last year, when these students were in the seventh grade, they showed, as predicted, a significant decrease in aggregation on both the SS index, $r = .44$, and the FF index, $r = .45$. The longitudinal comparisons of the SS and FF indices for these students as seventh and eighth graders show no significant differences, $t(45) = .84$ and .92, respectively. So, in spite of an almost significant negative trend over the course of the year on the aggregation indices, the average amount of mixing was no less this year than last.

As a further check on the long-term effect of the year of positive contact, the aggregation indices of this year's eighth graders were compared to those of their counterparts who were eighth graders last year. This cross-sectional comparison of the SS indices shows the difference predicted. This year's eighth graders are more likely to sit next to someone of the other race than were last year's eighth graders, $t(45) = 2.66$, $p < .02$. Although the means on the FF index point ot a similar conclusion, the difference is not statistically significant, $t(45) = 1.63$, n.s.

DISCUSSION

The results show clearly that race remains an extremely important grouping factor through the second year of desegregation even for children who have chosen to attend a racially mixed school. It is important to note, however, that sex is an even stronger grouping factor, cross-sex seating adjacencies being extremely rare in both the seventh and the eighth grades. While this finding is hardly new, it is worth noting that previous investigators have often failed to ask whether such strong aggregation by sex in the pre-adolescent years may have potentially serious negative consequences. Perhaps the lack of concern about the strength of sexual isolation in pre-adolescents is based on the certainty that, within a very few years, these students will dramatically escalate their cross-sex interaction rate as they pursue their various romantic interests. Even so, the possible consequences of discovering opposite-sex persons as love-interests without first having discovered them as peers would seem to merit more careful attention than it has received so far.

This second study replicated an unpredicted but potentially important finding in the earlier study -- that more race mixing occurs among the males than among the females. In fact, males account for the bulk of the inter-racial seating observed in the cafeteria. This finding of greater aggregation among females was obtained in a school having roughly equal proportions of black and white students. But it raises the possibility that, where either black or white students constitute a small minority, the female members of the minority may be particularly likely to experience social isolation.

The most puzzling outcome of the study was the failure to replicate last year's positive results in this year's seventh grade. The expected

positive time trend in interracial seating was not found; there was, in fact, a statistically non-significant suggestion of a slight negative trend. While this failure to replicate was not anticipated, a number of observed changes in the school this year make such an outcome understandable. First, some of the mechanisms employed last year to foster positive relations have been abandoned as unworkable and government money for other special activities has already begun drying up. The early media coverage of the school as an idealistic and hopeful experiment in racially balanced education has been largely supplanted by news of controversy over the new enrollment policy, shifting racial proportions, and alleged overcrowding. In fact, the city's commitment to creating and maintaining even one viable desegregated school has been sharply questioned by those who point to its failure this year to create a city-wide desegregation plan as the courts have ordered. Interviews conducted with a random sample of seventh graders both this year and last year when they were sixth graders show a general decrease in morale and school pride (Schofield & McGivern, 1977) suggesting that the students have been affected by the changes in the school. So, although the explanation is admittedly ex post facto, the shift from the relatively ideal contact conditions of last year to the more mixed conditions this year may serve to account for the failure to replicate last year's positive findings.

Looking at the eighth grade, we get a slightly different picture. Here, too, there was a negative time trend in interracial seating, but this was expected due to the academic tracking arrangement, and the results almost exactly parallel those obtained with last year's eighth grade. However, it is important to note that even this negative trend did not completely undo the positive effects of the previous year's contact. There was significantly

more interracial seating among this year's eighth graders than among last years.

While no direct data is available on the eighth graders' perceptions of their school, there is reason to believe that the eighth grade may have been less affected by the events mentioned above than the seventh grade. The eighth graders are physically isolated from the other grades within the school building. Also, they were in their final year at Hexler and hence probably less concerned with the high publicized changes in policies in the sixth grade. And, even when the enrollment change finally reaches the eighth grade level, it may not greatly alter the structure or racial composition of the regular and accelerated academic tracks.

The study's findings point up the crucial importance of attending to contact processes beyond the first year of desegregation. Bronfenbrenner (1967) has stated that even benignly structured contact may not be enough to overcome racial cleavage in our society, arguing instead for a strong activist approach to the problems which contribute to such cleavage. It may be that the momentum for the necessary activism is often generated in the early stages of desegregation but then allowed to dissipate to the point where the school can no longer hope to meet its most optimistic social goals.

It is clear, too, that the discrepancies between our first and second year studies have put us in the position of having to speculate about changes in the school which might account for the divergent patterns. The problem of demonstrating causal links is almost insurmountable when operating at the level of an entire school or grade. The use of a control school does not solve the problem since any two schools will differ simultaneously on several dimensions. Future research looking at the effects of variations

in settings and practices upon the intergroup behavior of smaller groups of students within single desegregated schools is greatly needed.

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TABLE 1

Mean Racial Aggregation Indices

Grade level	n of observations	Overall SS (Index 1)	Overall FF (Index 2)	Males only SS (Index 3)	Males only FF (Index 4)	Females only SS (Index 5)	Females only FF (Index 6)
First year of desegregation							
7	(17)	-1.71	-1.66	-1.51	-1.44	-1.82	-1.82
8	(17)	-1.77	-1.71	-1.65	-1.49	-1.84	-1.84
Second year of desegregation							
7	(31)	-1.78	-1.69	-1.63	-1.48	-1.90	-1.85
8	(30)	-1.67	-1.62	-1.42	-1.46	-1.86	-1.77

Note. Larger negative numbers represent greater aggregation, or less interracial seating.

TABLE 2

Comparison of Racial and Sexual Aggregation

Grade level	Type of index	n of observations	Grouping factor		t	p
			Race	Sex		
7	SS	31	-1.78	-1.97	8.28	< .001
	FF	31	-1.69	-1.96	7.94	< .001
8	SS	30	-1.67	-1.92	9.60	< .001
	FF	30	-1.62	-1.87	6.69	< .001

TABLE 3

Changes in Overall Racial Aggregation

Grade level	n of observations	SS (Index 1)	FF (Index 2)
	First year of desegregation		
7	(17)	.44*	.45*
8	(17)	-.05	-.53*
	Second year of desegregation		
7	(31)	-.34	-.29
8	(30)	-.14	-.43*

Note. Positive correlations represent decreasing racial aggregation (i.e., greater interracial mixing) over time.
*$p < .05$, two-tailed.